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My name is Kelly Massucci and I am the owner/director of The Talcott Center for Child Development in Farmington, CT. We provide occupational, physical and speech therapy services, as well as applied behavioral analysis to children with special needs. I am writing today with regard to the proposal to establish the Michaela Petit Four-O'Clocks as the children's state flower.

This past Spring, Vicki Scott approached me about planting a bed of four o'clocks in a garden area adjacent to our center. The flowers would be planted in memory of Michaela Petit. I jumped at this opportunity for a number of reasons.

- 1) It was an amazing cause. What a wonderful way to capture the memory of Michaela, as well as the sweetness and innocence that we cherish in our youth.
- 2) Our garden had been long neglected. We haven't had the opportunity to maintain it and it had become an eyesore that was over grown.
- 3) By revitalizing the garden, we could incorporate our clients into the care and maintenance of it, while maintaining the memory of Michaela.

With a small crew of colleagues, Vicki transformed our garden into a sea of colors. It was beautiful and cherished by all.

All of us at The Talcott Center are in favor of establishing the Michaela Petit Four-O'Clocks as the children's state flower. Since they have been planted at our center, we have been able to incorporate a number of our clients into the care and maintenance of the garden. The maintenance of the garden and harvesting of the four o'clock seeds has supported the growth and development of so many of our clients. From a therapy perspective, we have been able to work on the muscle coordination and strength of our children. They are required to weed and water the garden, managing garden tools and carrying watering cans. In addition, we are addressing their visual skills and fine motor skills as they search through and harvest the flower seeds.

In addition, maintenance of the garden has instilled a sense of responsibility within the children we work with. This past summer and fall, they eagerly looked forward to spending time in the garden. Not only did they work to maintain it, they embellished upon it. They made stepping stones, weeded around the bed, and planned for additional plantings and embellishments. In addition, the continued to keep the memory of Michaela Petit alive.

We eagerly look forward to this spring, when Michaela's four o'clocks will blossom, reminding us of warmer days and the memories she leaves behind.